

TEN WRONG KINDS OF HEARERS

NO. 2308

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 14, 1893
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, APRIL 21, 1889

*“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.
Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways,
as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God:
they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.”
Isaiah 58:1-2*

IF we would understand these words aright, we must remember that the people here mentioned were not good people—they were a set of hypocrites. This is quite clear if we read the verses that follow our text—“Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no notice? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exploit all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.”

It is a very pleasing sign when people like to go up to the house of God. I do not know of a more beautiful sight than the present congregation, with every seat occupied, and some people even willing to stand to hear the Word preached. There are many who would give all they have to see such a sight. How sad is the opposite of this! An empty place of worship—people loafing about at home all the Sabbath-day, not caring to listen to eternal truth—that is a very melancholy state of things. We take delight in seeing persons anxious to get in to hear the Word.

I know that there are some here who would not be absent from the assembly of God's people on any account. When they are ill, their Sabbaths are always dull to them. And if they go into the country, they seem to miss the opportunity of hearing the Gospel as they have been accustomed to hear it. All this is most pleasant and most delightful, yet remember that there may be nothing at all in it.

This congregation will soon scatter and break up—and when it is divided into its separate particles and nothing is left of it—it may come to pass that nothing will be left of it in another sense, that is, that there will be no result whatever from our meeting together. As I said in the prayer, it may be just one big wave breaking on the shore, dying away, and leaving nothing behind. I pray God that it may not be so.

Yet, my dear friends, you who are the most regular hearers of the Word and who have been so from your childhood, you need to be warned that the mere hearing of the Gospel will not save you. Ay, and the continuous hearing of it may increase your responsibility and do nothing more. If you are hearers only, it may come to pass that, at the last, you will have heard for the worse, not for the better, for the only record that will remain of all those Sundays and of all those sermons, will be that you have just so many times willfully hardened your neck and continued in rebellion against the tender mercy of God.

What I am going to do tonight is, not so much to preach Christ, though I trust I shall not fail to do that, as to deal with different classes of hearers and to show the difference that there is between those who hear without acceptance and without profit, and those who hear so as to please God—those whose hearing becomes a part of worship, those who hear desiring benefit themselves, and whose hearing becomes a saving act—for faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

While I try to draw a few distinctions, not occupying too much of your time upon any one of them, I invite every person here to examine himself, whether he be in the faith. I invite every hearer to put himself into the crucible to see what is his true condition in the sight of God. Never mind your neighbor—let him use his own ears for himself and do you use your ears for yourself just now. Better still, let each one of us go to the Lord with the psalmist's prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

I. First, THERE ARE SOME WHO GET NO GOOD OUT OF THE HEARING OF THE GOSPEL, BECAUSE THEIR HEARING IS SOON FOLLOWED BY FORGETTING.

It is the truth that they hear, and for a time they hear it with considerable attention. But it is only for a time. They regard the exercise of hearing as being confined to the time which the sermon occupies and with some, the shorter that time is, the better they like the discourse. When the sermon is over, it is done with as far as they are concerned.

They may happen to remember that they were at such a place, on such a day, and heard a sermon from such a text—but that is all that they remember. They are glad that the preacher's words should drop as the dew and distil as the rain—but they like it to be like the rain when it trickles off the leaf of the plant and leaves no mark—or like the dew which is exhaled ere ever the sun is up.

They do not want to have any abiding result from the hearing of the Word. It is a temporary thing with them. I was going to say it is a trumpery thing with them. They hear the preacher's message, the service is over, and at the door of the sanctuary they leave behind everything that they have gathered there—in fact, they have really gathered nothing.

Now, it is not so with the profitable hearer. He says to himself, "That which I am about to hear today is God's Word. My soul, take heed that you retain it and lay it by in store! You are listening to a Gospel which is the wonder of the ages. You are hearing of mysteries which angels desire to look into. You are hearing the story of God sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, that He might redeem men from going down into the pit. Now, my soul, hear for eternity!"

Ask that the impression made upon you shall last in life, in death, and be seen at the day of judgment to be a saving, enduring, sanctifying impression upon you. Oh, that men felt that to come to hear the Gospel is not like going to the market to hear goods cried, or going to an auction to hear an estate set forth and extolled, or attending a lecture to listen to what was done in the rocks in the ages past, or what is going on in the stars that glitter in the heavens! These are all things that will pass away.

We are come together to hear about God, heaven, hell, the soul, eternity, immortality, the judgment, the eternal reward—everlasting life and the everlasting doom—eternal death. Here is something worth the hearing. I sometimes think that I have no need to fret myself about how I put these things before my hearers, for if men were in their senses, they would naturally want to know the truth about their souls, and knowing that, in whatever language it was put, they would be quite content. If there were a lecture, tomorrow evening, upon how to make five hundred pounds a day—if a man could tell you how to do that, and yet he spoke in broken English, you would be quite satisfied so long as you could put in practice what he was teaching you.

And when we are teaching men the way to heaven, the way to peace with God, the way to get sin pardoned and the heart renewed, it ought not to matter how we deliver the message—the news itself ought to be so precious that men would be glad to hear it even though we stuttered and stammered it out. Alas, it is not so. But it would be so if all men were the right kind of hearers!

Wrong hearers belong to the Slate Club—they write on a slate what they hear and then wipe it all out. But the Christian hearer has the Gospel message “engraved as in eternal brass” and it abides with him world without end.

II. Next, THERE ARE SOME WHOSE HEARING IS THE HEARING OF MAN, AND NOT THE LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF GOD.

Dear friends, if you go into some places of worship where the preacher does not believe that the Word of God is inspired, you may listen to him or not as you like. He has no claim on your attention if what he preaches has not, “Thus saith the Lord,” at the back of it. You have as much right to require him to listen to you as he has to expect you to listen to him.

He has to tell you, and he will tell you his latest thoughts, his freshest inventions, his most novel excogitations. Well, you may throw them over the wall and have done with them, if you like. If he is a learned and clever man, you may attach to what he says the importance which you ought to attach to the words of a clever man, but you are not required to pay any more attention than that to anything that he has to say.

But if we plead with you that what we read to you is God’s Word, every syllable of it, and that what we preach, if it be not taken from God’s Word is nothing, that its only weight and force lie in this, that we deliver inspired truth, putting it into our own language, but still giving you the truth as far as we know it, as a revelation from God, then at your own peril will you refuse it.

These gentlemen who themselves deny the inspiration of the Book of God, thereby renounce all claim upon your attention except such as you like to give to your fellow men. But if a man can say, “Thus saith the Lord,” and the Lord has sent him in the power of His Spirit, and by His anointing, to deliver His Gospel as the Gospel of God and not the Gospel of man, then I pray you to give an earnest and a diligent heed to the things that you hear lest by any means you should let them slip.

We are nothing of ourselves, but if we deliver God’s message, that message is everything, and we can say to our hearers, with deep solemnity, “How shall ye escape if ye neglect so great a salvation?” If this be what God really speaks to you, then woe unto you if you will not hear it. And if this be in very truth an inspired message from heaven, then shall you be blessed if you hear it, for it is written, “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live.”

It makes all the difference between hearer and hearer whether you are hearing God or hearing only a man. If you hear the sermon as the word of man, it shall be the word of man to you and do you no good. But if you hear it as the Word of God—if you search your Bibles to see whether these things are so, and if, finding them to be God’s Word, you receive them, and tremble at them, and do honor to them as coming from God—then they are able to save your souls and they will save your souls.

Oh, my dear hearers, this may not seem a great point, but it is a truly essential one! Here we may divide our hearers. They who hear the Gospel as God’s voice, hear it to live—and they who hear it as the mere lecture of man, hear it in vain.

III. Let me draw another line of distinction, a pretty clear one, too. THERE ARE SOME WHO WILL HEAR THAT WHICH PLEASES THEM, BUT THEY WILL NOT HEAR THAT WHICH TRIES THEM.

I know my hearers pretty well by this time. There is one who likes good sound doctrine, and if you preach doctrine to him, he says, “Oh, ah, that is delicious!” Give him a precept. “Ugh!” he says, “I do not like that, you know. I never care much about duties.” You are a bad hearer—and you will get no blessing out of it.

There is another man who likes to hear about the practical part of Christianity. He belongs to the Ethical Society, but if you give him Scriptural teaching about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, he grinds his teeth and he is ready to turn on his heels and depart in a rage. That is not the kind of hearer whom God will accept, or who will get any good out of what he hears.

There are some hearers who like a sermon when it just brushes their fur the right way. “Oh!” they say, “that is the right sort of preacher for us. Those are our sentiments. Now we can go on as we have

been going. See what excuses he makes for us. He will allow us to be Christians and worldlings, too. That is the kind of preacher we like, one of your liberal sort.”

But the true hearer says to himself, “I do not ask to be pleased. Give me the man who just tells me the truth though it vexes me at the time that I hear it.” I do not want a doctor of the sort that says, “Oh, my dear sir, there is very little indeed the matter with you! You want just a week’s rest and change, and then you will be all right”—all the while knowing that you have a deadly and incurable disease upon you. Do you think that such a man deserves his guinea from the patient he is deceiving?

Give me the doctor who examines me through and through, who finds out to the best of his knowledge what ails me, and then deals with me like an honest man, not trying to make out that I am better than I am, but who tells me what my disease really is, and treats me for what he knows is wrong. Oh, yes, God’s ministers are not sent to please men! We are not sent to tickle itching ears, but to drive the sword of God’s Spirit into the hearts of men, for He says, “Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.”

God’s prophets are rough hewers. They come with the axe and with the rod. They come not to fiddle while you dance, nor to blow the trumpet to tell you of a victory won without fighting. Ah, sirs, you are bad hearers if you cannot hear that which rasps you, that which stings you, but which is honest truth, and is meant to make you repent of your sins.

Give me not the man who makes me merry, but the man who makes me penitent. Not the man who sends me home filled with a fine conceit of myself, but the man who, whatever I think of him, makes me think badly of myself and brings me to my knees to seek mercy through Jesus Christ my Savior. This point reveals a great difference among hearers, does it not?

IV. Now, there is another class, with whom I would deal next, namely, THOSE WHO ALWAYS WANT TO HEAR SOMETHING NEW.

We have in London a sort of flying camp of people who always turn up when there is anything fresh. Every new man gets a congregation for a time out of these celestial gypsies, that put up their tents on every common. You know this sort of people. If there is a new thing cried up, they are after it. There will be another novelty in six months’ time and they will be after that just as eagerly. They are always looking out for something fresh.

Did you ever grow any fruit trees? If so, did your gardener ever recommend that they should be transplanted every six months? If so, the apple chamber may be as small as you like. That kind of hearer, who first hears this, and then hears that, and then hears the other, and after that a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth thing, and always likes the last new toy best, is a baby to begin with, and he remains a baby to the end of the chapter. No, give me the truth that I knew as a boy, and fed upon then, and let me feed upon it still.

As I said this morning, the true Israelite was as well fed on the manna after forty years as he was at the first. It is the mixed multitude that wants the quails, and something else, but the heir of Canaan, the true Israelite, is satisfied to eat the bread that came down from heaven. He wants nothing better. He knows that there cannot be anything better. His prayer is, “Lord, evermore give us this bread.”

Do I address any here who go about from one place to another in this style? You sheep that never stop in one pasture, how will you ever fatten, how will you ever grow spiritually strong? Besides, I think your conduct shows that you do not know the great secret after all. If you did, you would be of his mind who said, “The old is better,” and having tasted that, you would keep to it even to the end.

V. Let me draw another line of distinction. THERE ARE SOME HEARERS WHOSE HEARING IS ALL FOR THE ELOQUENCE OF THE SPEAKER, AND NOT FOR THE SUBSTANCE OF THAT WHICH IS SPOKEN.

That comes home to some of you, I know. If a man can speak thoroughly well, and is a man of fluent utterance, a man of dramatic action, a man who makes the subject alive before your eyes, that is the preacher whose words you will remember. And he may preach any doctrine he likes, or no doctrine at all—that is not the point you are looking at.

Why, surely, you are like stupid people who will go to a shop, because it is such a handsome shop, no matter what is sold in it! It may be utter rubbish and your money may be all wasted, but then it is such a pretty shop, is it not? Why, you good housewives know better than to do that! Many a man has a pretty shop, but his wares are bad—buy not from him, I pray you. We do not want, on the few Sundays that we have, the few days which we have to live, and with death so near, and judgment so tremendous, to go to the house of God merely to have primroses and pretty flowers presented to us by the preacher.

Oh, for God's sake, put your flowers away! These souls are being damned. Come to close grips with them, sir, show them the way to heaven and leave your flowers until they get there, and then they will not care for your tawdry, artificial eloquence! The only eloquence that is worth having is that of the heart—that which comes straight up from the soul of a man and he speaks well because he speaks out of his heart.

O sirs, I charge you, do not so insult the God of heaven as to spend His Sabbath-day in merely listening to big words and fine oratory! What is this but to turn the chapel into a theater and to make the preacher to be a mere performer? I had rather use market language and be as vulgar as vulgarity itself, and carry souls to heaven, than be a very Demosthenes, or a Cicero, and leave men's hearts untouched. Alas, that there are hearers to whom the words are everything and the sense is nothing!

VI. I will draw another line, helping you at the same time to draw one for yourself. THERE ARE MANY WHO HEAR THE GOSPEL, BUT DO NOT HEAR IT FOR THEMSELVES.

They hear it as people look at a picture. You know what we do with it—we stand and look at the foreground, and judge as to the distance, and the side lights, and the perspective and so on (I do not know much about the terms of painting), and we just say, “That is a very beautiful view, that piece, of water yonder, that wood, those trees, the cattle, all are very pretty.”

Is not that how many people hear sermons? “Under the first head, did you notice so and so?” Or “Under the second head, did you observe what the preacher said?” “When he came to that point, I thought it was rather well-turned.” “I did not like so much that observation toward the close of the sermon—I thought that was rather rough.”

Yes, you see, you are judging the discourse as if it were a painting. That is all it is to you—but is this what it was meant to be? No, the true hearer looks into the Word of God as into a glass in which he may see himself as he really is. And when he sees himself in that glass, he says, “I did not know that I had that spot over the left eye. I was not aware that I had that blotch on my forehead. I must go and wash and be cleansed.” It is well to hear a discourse that makes you see yourself as you are in God's sight.

Many when they hear a sermon say, “I wonder how So and so would feel that sermon.” What have you to do with him? Lend anything that you have to spare, but do not lend your ears. They will never come home so sound as when you lent them out. Keep your ears for your own use and let the truth go home to your own heart, for this, and this only, is the kind of hearing that will ever save the soul. When you yourself hear for yourself, then you may yourself get right with God and live by faith in Christ Jesus.

VII. Now I will mention a point which, I am afraid, will come home to a very large number now present. THERE IS AMONG HEARERS TOO MUCH OF UNPREPARED HEARING.

I will tell you what I mean. The man comes fresh from the shop. That I do not mind, but perhaps he comes in fresh from care, from anger, from quarrelling, from the use of unhallowed language. And he comes in to hear the Word of God with his ears stopped up.

Now, the right way to hear so as to get a blessing is to hear with prayer, to come up to hear what God the Lord shall speak, praying all the while, “O God, bless the message to my soul! Send me strength tonight through some part of what is said or sung that I may really be fit to hear Your Word. Prepare me, for the preparation of the heart is from You. Make me like a plot of ploughed land that, when the seed falls upon me, I may receive it and bring forth a harvest.”

Now, my dear hearers, do you think that we really prepare ourselves enough for the hearing of the Word of God? Do you not think that we lose a great blessing because we do not come prepared to hear what God the Lord will say unto us?

I have sometimes been greatly rejoiced when I have seen the numbers of persons who have been brought to Christ by my preaching, but I have always taken a very large discount off anything like praise that I might give to myself, for I have said, “Why, those people as a rule come on purpose to hear me!” When I have preached in the country, the people have come there on purpose to hear and have had almost to fight to get in—and they have made up their minds that they are going to hear something that they want to hear and something that will be a blessing to them, and they have sat with their mouths wide open, taking in every word. Of course, anybody can open oysters when they open their shells themselves.

When people come prepared, then it is that their hearts are readily reached. But when people come prejudiced, with their shells tightly shut up, when they do not mean to hear, do they wonder that no good comes to them through the discourse? How could it? Only by a wonderful act of the sovereignty of divine grace could they expect to get a blessing.

VIII. There is a further distinction that I must mention. THERE ARE MANY WHO COME TO GOD’S HOUSE TO HEAR FROM A LOW MOTIVE and such do not usually get a blessing.

Some come from a very base motive. We have known some come that they may catch up a word with which they may find fault. Oh, dear hearts, if you want to find fault with me, you need not listen for five minutes! I shall always give you plenty of opportunity, and let me tell you another thing, I shall not fret if you find the opportunity. It will not in the least degree trouble me. I would rather that you should find fault than that you should be quite indifferent.

If you will only let the Word enter your hearts, you may do what you will with me—kick me, if you like—only mind that you get to heaven yourself. There are some who make a man an offender for a word. They turn over all the basket of fish, and because there is one that does not smell quite sweet, they cry it all over the market. That is their style of acting towards the preacher. They would not like to be dealt with in that way themselves. It is a base motive altogether.

Some come from another motive. There is one here tonight. He has come up to see his brother. He does not generally go to a place of worship, but John said to him, “William, come to the Tabernacle with me tonight.” He does not like to offend John and so he comes. Another young man has come because there is a young woman who comes here. I am not going to blame him for that, but still, it is not an honorable motive for going to hear the Word of God.

Another has come to see the Tabernacle, to look at the building. And another has heard that the preacher is such a queer man. He will come and just see what he really is like. That is a poor motive. Many of you come because—well, you have only come here because your mother comes here. You come because it is the custom and the habit—and you would not like to become perpetual Sabbath-breakers, forsaking the assembling of yourselves together.

If that is all you come for, you will get it, and it is nothing. But if you come to hear the Word, saying, “I come to weigh it, to see whether it is God’s Word, and if it is, I will follow it. If it comes to me with the power of the Holy Ghost, commending itself to my conscience, I will obey it, I will yield to it, for I want to find salvation through the Word of God, and I come with that intention”—I do not believe you will come a dozen times, any one of you, to hear the Gospel with a view of finding Christ in it, but what you will find Him. “He that seeketh findeth.”

IX. I must draw yet another distinction and that is, that MANY COME TO HEAR THE WORD, BUT AFTER HAVING HEARD IT, THERE IS NO IMPROVEMENT IN THEM.

One of our brethren told me, just now, that a friend in the market said to him, “Do you always hear Mr. Spurgeon?” “Yes,” he answered, “I have heard him these five-and-twenty years.” The other said, “Then you ought to be a good fellow.” “Well,” said I, “he did not say you were a good fellow, did he?” “No, but he said I ought to be.”

If you have heard the Gospel for twenty-five years, you ought to be a good fellow. If it is the Word of God that you have heard—and you have not improved by it—surely you are becoming like that fig tree that brought forth no fruit. At last the mandate went forth, “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” But alas, there are many who hear the Word for years, but are none the better for all their hearing.

X. Lastly, THERE ARE SOME PERSONS WHO DO NOT HEAR TO PROFIT BECAUSE THEY DO NOT BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

You have not accepted the Christ who has been preached. You have heard about faith, but you have not believed. You have heard about repentance, but you have never repented. What do you come for if you never make any practical use of what you hear? Why do you come?

A man keeps a shop on the Causeway and you go into the shop when he opens it on Monday. You go up and down, look at all the things, and go out again. Do the same on Tuesday and Wednesday, ask to see his goods, and look them all over, but do not buy anything. Try that for a week and you will get some very clear hints that you are not wanted there. If you go to a shop, you are expected to buy.

I would like to give some of you a plain hint about that matter. You have come to my shop and turned my goods over, but you have not bought anything. Is my price too high? It is “without money, and without price,” so you cannot say that. “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Come and take the Savior and He is yours. Trust Him and you are saved.

Why, would a person go to see a physician, and go often, and pay his guinea, as some of you pay your pew-rents, and yet never take the physic, never get the prescriptions made up—but just get the directions and then neglect them? It is absurd. Such a man as that must be a fool.

I will not say that anybody here is a fool, but I do not know what else he is if he understands what he must do to escape from the wrath to come and yet never does that. This line is a very clear and distinct one, and I wish that we might cross it tonight if we have never before crossed it. Cross the line by decision for Christ. That is the point.

You have heard aright if you have found Christ. You have heard for nothing if you have not found Him. If you have looked to Him upon the cross, you have heard to your eternal profit, for he that looks to Him shall live. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God. If you are trusting yourself wholly to Him, you have eternal life, for he that believes in Him has everlasting life.

But if you believe not in Christ, you might as well have heard the noise of Cheapside as have heard the sound of the Gospel. You might as well have heard the roll of the drum at the barracks as have listened to the proclamation of Jesus Christ, for all the good that it will ever bring to you.

Now hear God’s message to every one of you tonight, you who have not yet believed—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thine house.” God help you to do it, for His dear love’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 13:6-30

Verse 6. *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.*

It was a fig tree, a fruit-bearing tree by profession, so it ought to have borne fruit. It was planted. It was not a wild tree, it was planted in a vineyard, in the proper place for fig trees to grow, in good soil, and therefore the owner of it had a right to come and look for fruit on it. But he found none.

Have we not here tonight some who are planted in the church of God who ought, by their profession, to be bearing fruit, but they are not? Christ has come and He has looked for fruit. But He has found none.

7. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

The owner seems to say, “If I had not found fruit the first year, I should have thought that the season was unfavorable. If I had found no fruit the second year, I might have thought that peradventure the tree was a little out of condition and would come round again. But when I come for three years, and three years consecutively, and I find no fruit, then it is clear that the fig tree is a barren one. Why should it stay here and spoil the soil, occupy the place that a good fig tree might have occupied, and take away the nutriment from other trees?”

So if, after many years, some of you have brought forth no fruit, God may well complain about you. You are eating the bread that might have nourished a saint. You are occupying a place in which your influence is injurious to others. Others do less because you do nothing. I pray the Holy Spirit to bring this home to the conscience of any barren professor whom it may concern, lest the command should go forth, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”

8-9. And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

Even the vinedresser’s pleading has a limit—“Give it one more year.” He admits that the time must come for the axe to cut down the tree that is fruitless. The cumber-ground tree cannot stand forever—it is unreasonable that it should. And you cannot be permitted to live forever in sin—you cannot be allowed to taint the air with blasphemy for another fifty years. There must come an end to such a life as yours and that end may come very soon. The edge of the axe is sharp and the hand that wields it is strong. Beware, O barren tree!

10. And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

When there happened a very remarkable miracle. The parable that preceded it was a parable of judgment—the miracle that followed was a miracle of mercy and grace.

11-12. And behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him,

You can see her slowly moving along, bent double. Hers was a painful walk, but she came at Christ’s call.

12-13. And said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

See what Christ can do. After I had preached this morning, I had to speak with just such a woman as this, one who has been, for many years, the victim of deep despondency. How I wished that I could lay my hands on her and say, “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity”! But we cannot work such a miracle as that. It is Christ who must do it all, and blessed be His name, He is always great at a pinch!

Christ loves to come in at a dead lift. When we are all beaten and we have reached man’s extremity, then it is Christ’s opportunity. Oh, you poor despairing woman, bent double by your sadness, the Lord’s hand can restore you, and we pray for you tonight, even the thousands of Israel pray for you at this moment! Lord, lay Your hand upon that poor child of infirmity!

14. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation,

Wretched creature, to be indignant at Christ’s doing good! There is no reckoning with self-righteous people. They are mad themselves, and they think others so.

14-15. Because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite,—

It served him right. This is just the word that would naturally come to the lips of the Savior. Because He was loving and tender, He could not endure this hypocritical indignation—“The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite,”

15-16. *Doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?*

A very conclusive argument. You may do deeds like this on the Sabbath, and you may come and be healed on the Sabbath, even though it should involve you in a journey. It is so needful that you should get the bread of heaven, so needful that you should get the blessing of Christ, that on this day you may come and be healed.

17-19. *And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him. Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.*

You get a little grace tonight. Let that divine Man take but a grain of the mustard seed of His grace and drop it into your heart, which He will have prepared like a garden, and there is no telling what will come of it. That sigh, that tear, that wish will grow into holiness of life and zeal of conduct. It may be but very little in its beginning, but it will grow. Both good and evil begin with very small eggs, but they grow into great things.

20. *And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?*

Now take the bad side and see how the kingdom of God may be perverted and injured by evil influences.

21. *It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

That woman of Rome has hidden her leaven in the church and it has leavened the whole—and now the woman of intellect has put her leaven into the church. Conceited self-invention of new doctrines, perversion of the simplicity of the Gospel—that kind of leaven has been hidden in the meal of the church—and it is leavening the whole. God help us to keep out the leaven both of Romanism and of Rationalism!

22. *And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.*

His face was toward the cross, He was working His passage to His sacrifice, and preaching His way to that place where He should complete our redemption. This is a wonderful picture of Christ—“teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.”

23. *Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?*

What business is that of ours? Our business is far more practical—to be saved ourselves, and to endeavor to be the means of saving others. Jesus did not answer the question—He did what was better.

23-24. *And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

You can get into the broad road without striving. But you must, “strive to enter in at the strait gate.” Strive for that which requires self-denial, that which humbles you, that which goes against the grain, that which is not according to human nature. Do not imagine that grace is to be had while you are half asleep and that heaven is to be gained on a feather bed.

Strive, strive, for many will seek in vain to enter. Seeking is not enough. It must come to a holy violence—“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” When will that be? That will be when you are in another state.

25. *When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us;*

They will be very respectful. They will call him, “Lord.” They will be very earnest. They will pray, “Lord, Lord.” They will be very simple and very honest in their request—“Open unto us.” They will be very personal—“Open unto us.” Such will the prayers of the ungodly be when they wake up to the fact that they are shut out of heaven.

25-26. *And he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.*

They came to the communion table. They used to hear sermons indoors and out of doors. “Thou hast taught in our streets.”

27. *But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.*

They shall be judged by their works. If they were workers of iniquity, it proved that they were unrenewed and unsaved. Christ will not endure their company, but will say to them, “Depart from me.”

28. *There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*

You who thought that you had a share in the kingdom of God, and were, by birth, the natural heirs of it—“You yourselves thrust out.”

29-30. *And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.*

The least likely to be saved shall be saved. The blackest sinners, the vilest outcasts, the grossest unbelievers, shall be brought to repentance and faith, and shall be saved. While those who were first in privileges, children of godly parents, professors of religion, those who appeared in every way likely to be saved first, will be left to the last, and be shut out of the kingdom of God, never to enter.

God grant, in His infinite mercy, that nobody in the Tabernacle tonight may be of that unhappy number! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—488, 508, 525

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.